

**An experience like no other!**



I have been working for the Island Conservation Society (ICS) for the past seven years and getting the opportunity to take part in the US International Visitor Leadership Programme was an experience like no other.

After studying Countryside Management at the University of Aberystwyth, I started work at the Ministry of Environment at the age of 21 and then in 2007, I got a position working with the ICS (Island Conservation Society) on Alphonse Island to conduct conservation activities including turtle monitoring, coral reef monitoring, diving activities, invasive species control/eradication and promoting conservation of islands.

I lived on Alphonse Island for about three years and this inspired my interest to stay in the environmental sector and continue working with the ICS on Mahe. For the last four years I have managed the organisation's scientific and projects department.

We are a small team at the ICS so the work is plenty but very rewarding. Although our focus is the conservation of our precious Seychelles islands' environment, we are always trying to keep ourselves and our island teams aware of international environmental issues and what we can learn from them.

The ICS has always maintained a good relationship with the US State Department's Environmental Initiatives and therefore it was a great pleasure for me to be invited by the US Department of State to take part in an International Visitor Leadership Programme (IVLP), focusing on coastal and marine protection in the US from May 25 to June 13, 2014.

As a conservationist who loves the water and a Seychellois who had never visited the USA this was a fantastic opportunity for me. The event was a multi-regional programme which involved a diverse team of marine experts/managers from various countries ranging from Albania to Vietnam. We got to visit four different states during the course of the programme, namely Washington DC, California, Oregon and Miami in four different corners of the US and this provided a magnificent way of learning about and comparing different issues and management interactions across different regions in a short amount of time.

From a personal and professional view point the main aim to take part in this programme was to gain valuable experience and knowledge about how organisations in the US tackle various marine and coastal management issues, especially with regards to threats such as marine debris, climate change, marine invasives and protected areas management. I managed to assess to varying degrees how effective the assorted

management methods are, so that the lessons I learned can be applied in a Seychelles context.

Some aspects of the programme which really caught my eyes included how many organisations go the extra mile to get environmental messages across to different audiences, especially in regards to new technological advances. One example was the tour of 'Science on a Sphere' at the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in Washington DC. I was inspired by the innovative way that data (ex. ocean temperature, atmospheric storms, climate change) being collected by NOAA is then synthesised into visual models, which make complex information more simplified and in turn this can be better understood by the general public and those working within the environmental sector.

The programme also allowed opportunities for building new partnerships relating to marine resource management within Seychelles. There are many follow-up actions and priorities identified that the ICS is keen on developing with several key organisations that I visited during the course of this programme and we shall be pursuing these partnerships in the coming year or so and identifying how Seychelles can benefit.

One take home message and key solution identified to prevent/reduce leakage of waste (especially plastics) into the ocean, which is an ongoing and often neglected worldwide problem threatening our livelihoods, is by building partnerships with large manufacturers/industries (ex. Coca Cola, Unilever, Nestle).

These partnerships lead to better understanding between the industrial world and the importance their activities being sustainable and environmentally sensitive. There is also a huge importance to increase public outreach and educational programmes to instigate behavioural change. As a non-governmental organisation (NGO), the ICS will endeavour to work with the Seychelles government to possibly develop such programmes to address and mitigate these issues.

Overall, it was a very fruitful programme as it fulfilled all the main objectives. After some whale watching in Newport and site-seeing in Washington DC, making lots of new friends and having lots of large American meals, it was time to come home and head back to the ICS office.

I returned feeling very lucky to have had the opportunity to experience all that I did. I would not have had the chance to visit the US if I had not been working in this sector and I urge other fellow Seychellois to get involved in the environmental field.

To sum up, I believe that we all have a role to play in the world's environment and we all need to be more proactive. I think the words of Bob Filner, congressman D-CA, say it best: "If people decide to get involved change [for the better] can happen".

On behalf of the ICS I would like to express my sincere thanks to the US Embassy in Mauritius and US Department of State for this opportunity to take part in the International Visitor Leadership Programme.

**By Pierre-Andre Adam**